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Letter dated 23 January 2001 from the Permanent Representative of the Gambia to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

Upon the instructions of my Government, in pursuance of my letter dated 28 December 2000 to you (S/2001/8), I have the honour to state as follows:

While continuing to refute categorically any official involvement in the illegal trade of Sierra Leone diamonds, the Government of the Gambia has never denied that some individuals have been involved in this trade long before the Gambia became independent. This is common knowledge. A clear distinction must therefore be made between the actions of individuals and those of a Government. Individuals should be accountable for their actions. A Government should not be taken to task to account for the actions of an individual or group of individuals, especially in a case like this.

Secondly, the Government of the Gambia still cannot understand why the members of the Panel of Experts on Sierra Leone Diamonds and Arms visited all the countries mentioned in their report except the Gambia. Is there a hidden agenda? What is the motive behind those baseless and malicious allegations? Why this smear campaign against a country that has done so much for Sierra Leone, a sister country, and continues to play its part, modestly but sincerely, through concerted international effort, to bring a lasting peace to that country? The Government and people of the Gambia expect answers to these questions in order to set the record straight and redress the situation. The Government of the Gambia will defend its integrity at all costs. In this regard, it is inviting the Panel to present any evidence on these allegations. If the Panel fails to do so, then the Gambia should be removed from the list of countries trading in conflict diamonds. The Government of the Gambia is therefore giving the Panel two weeks to respond, failing which it would be compelled to take any appropriate action necessary to clear its name and restore the country's image as a respectable and peace-loving member of the international community.

Thirdly, it is amazing to note that helpless developing countries always bear the brunt of sanctions and the threat of sanctions but not the developed countries that buy these diamonds and then sell them for profit. This is a clear practice of double standards, bordering on outright discrimination against developing countries, especially African countries. The Gambian authorities would like to know why. Is it because they are developed countries? Is it because they are European countries? It is the view of the Government of the Gambia that the countries that are the final

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destination of these conflict/blood diamonds, that is to say, those countries in the developed world where they are sold, should also be sanctioned and not transit countries alone.

In light of the foregoing, therefore, the Government of the Gambia is reiterating its request for the Security Council to suspend its consideration of the report (S/2000/1195, annex, enclosure) until a delegation of the Panel visits the Gambia, in all fairness, guided by the principle of equal treatment of all Member States. The Council is expected to address our concerns without fear or favour.

Furthermore, in the case of the Gambia there is no evidence whatsoever establishing any links between the sale of such diamonds and gun-running activities in Sierra Leone. Besides, the Gambia has no borders with Sierra Leone.

I should therefore be most grateful if the present letter could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Baboucarr-Blaise Ismaila **Jagne**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative